



GIVING BACK

by WoVO Board Member Ann Richardson

World-Voices Organization is holding its second annual WoVOCon in Las Vegas, April 17-19, 2015. After holding the first one last year, we have learned many things about how to improve this “shareholder’s meeting,” and what to add or change in order to make our conference the most beneficial to our members and ultimately, the voiceover industry.

One thing we are able to do this year, is to make a donation of a portion of the proceeds from this convention, to a charitable organization whose goals we find to be in line with our general philosophies. Early in 2015, the WoVO Executive Board chose Learning Ally as the recipient. A table-top type display will include a continually-playing Learning Ally video, and informational handouts will be available. We will also facilitate members’ personal donations (if they wish to do so) to Learning Ally. But what is Learning Ally, and why did the Executive Board choose it?

Learning Ally (www.learningally.org) is a national non-profit dedicated to helping blind, visually impaired and dyslexic students succeed in education. Started in 1948 in the New York Public Library as Recording for the Blind, the organization utilized volunteers to record books for blinded veterans returning from WW II. Learning Ally now offers the world’s largest collection of human-narrated audio textbooks and literature as well as solutions, support and community for parents, teachers and students

Why did WoVO’s Executive Board choose Learning Ally? The basic principal of the organization neatly dovetails into our own philosophy: helping others achieve their goals. We can be of service to this organization, not only by donating financially, to help them realize their mission, but also by volunteering what each and every one of us in WoVO has... the gift of voice. Here is a link if you are interested in using your vocal skills to help Learning Ally:

<https://go.learningally.org/about-learning-ally/volunteers/how-you-can-help/>

Donating your voice and time to organizations such as Learning Ally can provide many of the same benefits as others who volunteer enjoy:

Make important networking contacts.

Learn or develop skills.

Teach your skills to others.

Enhance your résumé

Gain work experience.

Build self-esteem and self-confidence.

Improve your health.

Meet new people.

I have been volunteering with Learning Ally since 2009, when it was known as 'Recording For the Blind and Dyslexic'. I was just starting out in the voiceover field, and once I passed their test and became a narrator, my world just opened up and I knew I wanted to focus on narrating audiobooks. *I learned valuable skills.* I had to describe briefly, yet completely, illustrations, photographs, charts, graphs and other data. While honing my skills and gaining practical experience, I narrated a couple of books for local authors (*important networking contacts!*). I sent one a note expressing my pleasure at narrating her book, and she bartered with me to design a new website for me in exchange for my professional narration of her book. Another local author chose me to narrate her book, through her association with Learning Ally, and now I will be narrating her next book, coming out in the summer of 2015. *I shared my experiences and knowledge with others* when I directed and engineered for new narrators there. I can also say that *it improves my health*; because I spend so much time in my tiny recording booth, it's always exhilarating to drive into the studio and record there, chatting with other narrators and professionals. In addition, I've helped coordinate celebrity narrators for Learning Ally's "Record-A-Thon" fundraisers. This has allowed me to *meet new people* such as local radio DJs, many notable authors, and even fellow WoVO member, Simon Vance, whom I took to the studios two years in a row to narrate at the event.

But I am not the only one who touts the benefits of helping those who need it; I recently asked a couple of award-winning narrators to chime in on the subject.

Grover Gardner, of Blackstone Audio, had this to say about his time spent working at the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped:

"The training I got there was absolutely invaluable when it came to competing in the commercial audiobook market. In terms of pacing, relaxation, researching vocabulary and other issues, it was a huge advantage to get that sort of training. At NLS, we not only narrated but had to engineer and proof as well – that was part of the deal. Working with other narrators as an engineer gives you an excellent sense of how things are coming across 'on the other side of the glass,' so to speak. Issues such as breathing properly, leaving clean spaces for edits between sentences, and other technical points become a lot clearer when you work with other narrators as an engineer and proofer. Everyone loves an 'editor-friendly' narrator and that's the sort of thing we were taught.

But probably the most valuable aspect is learning to leave behind your self-consciousness, trust the text, let the book do the work and forget about how you 'sound,' focusing your energies on the material instead. There's nothing like a lot of practice just knocking out the text to help narrators learn where their focus needs to be."

The other narrator I queried was Patrick Lawlor, and he recalled his time spent volunteering at Learning Ally several years ago: "At the time, I was only doing a few books a year, so it was two-fold. I wanted more experience, and I wanted to give back. I think it is important for those of us who are blessed or gifted in some way to give back to those less fortunate. Donating our time and talent takes so little and makes a huge difference. Why not do it? We all do better when we all do better!"

I hope, if you're attending WoVOCon in April, that you'll look for the Learning Ally display, and consider giving in some way. If you are not attending, here are a couple of links to take you to where you can find out more information, and make a donation, if you are so inclined.

To donate: <http://naa55.kintera.org/faf/home/default.asp?ievent=1129591>

To volunteer:

<https://go.learningally.org/about-learning-ally/volunteers/how-you-can-help/>